

February-1886-

THE DISINTEGRATION OF CANADA

Our Canadian neighbors adjoining the Eastern border have been and are at present afflicted with serious family jars. Troubles provincial and difficulties municipal have contributed to set French and English by the ears, the great plague-smitten city of Montreal being the principal seat of the unhappy strife. Much excitement prevails in the ranks of the disputants, while mutual recrimination and defiance combine with revived race antipathies to embitter life and damage the material interests of all alike. No doubt there is room for honest differences of opinion between French Canadians and British on various questions of a provincial or municipal character, and such are not seldom expressed in temperate, sensible language; but there is a set of budding lawyers, of lofty ambition, as well as a crowd of selfish politicians who make it their business to foment national strife and exaggerate reasonable differences on all occasions, in order to promote their own contemptible ends. Frenchmen, moreover, of any education, are easily moulded into politicians, fluent, demonstrative, and excitable, while the British, though cooler and self-confident enough, are not slow to make known a "grievance," or to resent with a liberal measure of growls, a deliberate insult.

Such needy and "stagey" politicians supply suitable material for the common herd of patriots ever ready to take fire not simply when French interests, but when French whims and prejudices, even, are concerned. The mention of the benefits of British rule and French indebtedness thereto which the opposite disputants occasionally indulge in, to tease and humble "Johnny Crapaud," invariably proves both the red flag and the goad productive of the most rabid excitement. Whether he feels it all is another question. At any rate, he certainly succeeds to perfection in simulating intense indignation, while striving to alarm his opponents with the dreadful possibilities likely to flow from his offended pride. "Have we not opened our hospitable gates to your British emigrants, driven out by poverty from your own land, cared for your sick and helped you in your struggle for a living?" are questions not seldom flung in the faces of the "Johnny Bulls," whose ingratitude naturally supplies in this connection a fertile theme of the hottest denunciation.

Of the nationality controversy, its ideas and snappish tone, the fol-

lowing extract from an editorial in the *Montreal Herald*, with the subjoined reply from a French paper of the same city, *Le Monde*, supplies an interesting specimen. The former demands as it rushes to the attack—"Is this a British province?" The question is thus answered by itself—"If it is not, it is time it was. From the expressions that reach the public from time to time, many might be led to suppose that it was not. We hear so much about treaty rights, about *La Belle France*, about the tricolor, about everything that seems to link the province of Quebec with old France, that it might almost be taken for granted that a large portion of the population had forgotten that there were British interests to be considered here. But if treaty rights have been respected, if they have been enjoyed to the full, it has been because Great Britain has kept her word to the very letter, and because British colonists have seen the honor of their mother-country maintained. If the inhabitants of Quebec enjoy political peace and material prosperity, these are largely due to the beneficent political institutions which have been granted by Great Britain." To which *Le Monde* replies: ". . . No; it is a French province which the destiny of war has placed under the protection of the English. The sovereign of Great Britain has a right to our loyalty, which she possesses, but we retain the privilege of remaining French, and even if it displeases our enemies we will continue to be French. . . . The French Canadians do not owe the liberty they enjoy to the English. Our liberties were acquired by the price of our blood, and we have shared them with those who to-day desire to confiscate them to their own advantage. The *Herald* is mistaken if it thinks we are alarmed at the specter of annexation. Whether we be English, American, or Canadian citizens, we will always remain French. Let those whom this displeases do as they think proper." There is a serious as well as a ludicrous side to this quarrel. After a century's possession of the province by England, with vigorous, systematic, and continuous efforts, at great expense, to colonize its wastes and Anglicize its Gallic inhabitants, we witness the most striking evidences of failure supplied by a people, many of whom pride themselves on being more French than ever, more attached to the language, ideas, and country of their ancestors. But there are French Canadians, and French Canadians. Some of them unquestionably have been and are being impregnated with British ideas to an extent creditable to their liberality and good sense. Contact with imperial officials for three generations, as well as with leading Englishmen in the cities and towns, and a knowledge of what has happened in France and England, politically and socially, since the French Revolution, have made impressions on the more intelligent Canadians,

friendly to British rule and free institutions, such as prevail under the Union Jack and American Eagle.

Nor can it be doubted that a powerful factor in the expansion of the Canadian mind, and in the liberalizing of Canadian feelings of late years, is an extensive intercourse with the United States, to which thousands of French as well as British Canadians annually repair. Among the results of this communication, which appears likely to extend with time, must be set down a better feeling toward the United States, and a substantial respect for the hospitality, wealth, and energy of its people. Indeed, any old prejudice against them, not to speak of hatred, seems a thing of the past.

On the other hand, whatever sentimental theories or policies may be affected by the admission, the fact that a large proportion of the French do not like the British and their ways, stands out nakedly. The conquerors and "new comers" meet them in business and in politics as rivals, and this friction touches the pockets and ruffles the vanity of a people, as sensitive in these respects as their compatriots of *La Belle France* across the ocean. If this section be blind to the undeniable benefits of British rule, genius and enterprise, the English are not slow to remind them of it, nor to arrogate to themselves a very liberal share of the credit connected with the prosperity of the province. They also feel offended at that alleged blindness and ingratitude which refuses to them, the ameliorators, a larger amount of influence in social and political affairs.

Now, the question naturally arises—have the British any reason for their complaint of declining influence, and French aggression in civil affairs? Events of recent years, I must confess, favor an affirmative answer. As long ago as the period preceding Confederation, it was predicted by statesmen and others that the establishment of separate provincial governments would develop local prejudices and leave race and other minorities at the mercy of the local majorities; and that whatever satisfaction the Upper Canada (now the Ontario) majority might derive from the change, the British minority of Lower Canada (Quebec) would, ere many years, have good reason to regret it. Recent events have justified their foresight. Contemporaneously with the rapid disappearance of the English population in Quebec city and other parts of the province, we have seen, of late years, a gradual and astonishing growth of the French, especially in the direction of the Eastern townships. This growth has been greatly aided by the repatriation scheme started, shortly after Confederation, and so highly favored by the Roman Catholic clergy, in order to coax back their flocks from the United States, and prevent further migration thereto,

which might, to their patriotic and religious fancies, be attended with the loss, to the outgoers, of their language and religion! Colonization roads and the throwing open of indifferent and moderately good crown lands are among the means employed to effect those objects, toward which considerable progress has been attained. The British feel they have grown weaker numerically and otherwise, while the French show no little elation over their corresponding gains.

Meantime, however sore the feeling of any race minority, and however apprehensive as to possible aggression or injustice, in future, by the majority, the kindred and sympathizing majority of no other province can help it; each province, which means each majority, is entirely independent of all the rest in regard to local and municipal affairs. Nor is there any prospect of a change in this respect more agreeable to any provincial minority; for the Ontario Liberal party, which is powerful at Ottawa, in the Federal House, and is supreme at Toronto, where it has ruled the last dozen years, is resolutely opposed to the slightest interference with provincial authority by the General Government. The specter of possible French rule is as terrible to the imagination of the English-speaking Liberals of Ontario and Quebec as it was before Confederation when it possessed much vigor and devotion to its interests. One-fourth of the members of the Parliament at Ottawa is French Canadian. This element is, generally speaking, three-fourths Conservative, under excellent discipline, highly sensitive to its own interests, and fully alive to the practical value of party loyalty. It has not been weakened, much less paralyzed by the larger union of the provinces, its strength, on the contrary, being relatively greater to-day in the Dominion than fifteen years ago. Nor, so long as the majority holds together, as during the last thirty-five years, is the race likely to lose weight in even Dominion affairs, while, with its present and constantly augmenting advantages, in Quebec, it cannot fail to aggrandize itself.

The English are becoming more and more discouraged and unsettled as the years go by. "What have we to expect from this steadily increasing, rather jealous and not friendly majority?" is a question commonly put by the former, who never were in a worse humor for being Gallicized or trampled upon. They naturally, also, with that practical habit characteristic of the race, criticize the fruits of French rule in Quebec province, after the following fashion: "What have they done with all their opportunities and advantages since Confederation, when they started on equal terms with Ontario, in the race of local self-government and development? Have they not been woefully beaten in almost every department of material progress? Has not Ontario a far superior school

system, better public and municipal roads, with a much greater extent of them; and, has she not spent infinitely more on public improvements, such as opening up and settling wild lands in the remotest sections, subsidizing colonization northern railways, and so forth, while liberally maintaining an excellent array of charitable institutions for the defective and afflicted? Has not all this and more been done simultaneously with a material increase of her surplus, which now amounts to several millions? While our province, the oldest and by long odds, the first in the race a couple or three generations ago, can hardly maintain the population with which it entered Confederation, Ontario has doubled its population in thirty years, boasting at present over 200,000 souls!" "Quebec, besides," it is often added—"got through her surplus of ten or twelve years ago, having the last few years been living from hand to mouth." Doubtless the \$3,000,000 lately granted her for the North Shore Railway, between Quebec and Montreal, made over to the Canadian Pacific Railway, will fill some hideous gaps, and tide off a little longer the era of deficits that all thoughtful Britons and many shrewd Frenchmen themselves, expect ere many years; but this resource exhausted, and the general Federal and local taxation constantly augmenting, there will be no alternative by and by but a cry for a rearrangement of the financial terms of the Union, or further borrowing in disguise.

Can not Quebec settle her waste places, open up and develop her northern regions and utilize her timber and other resources like Ontario? some may ask. Not for a long time to any material extent, I fear must be the answer. Whatever the cause, nowadays Frenchmen do not in large numbers penetrate and clear up the remote wilderness, converting its vast expanse into smiling farms. They lack the perseverance, and self-denial conspicuous in former days, which virtues have been abundantly displayed by the pioneers of Ontario and the British emigrants who have, within the last two or three decades, transformed hundreds of miles of its remote and difficult forests, forbidding hills, and gloomy swamps, into the fairest scenes of civilization. The habits of the French Canadians have wonderfully changed, thousands now abandoning the snug houses and old cleared farms of fathers and grandfathers for the lighter work of the New England and Canadian factories and workshops, or scattering through the British agricultural districts or lumbering on timber limits.

But if there be an evil genius of the French, its utmost cunning could not have been more effectually employed to discredit their intelligence and damage their interests than have those results been effected by their insane and obstinate resistance to vaccination. It has taken six months' ravages

of the plague, only less appalling and destructive than the cholera in Spain, to teach the French Canadian majority of the Montreal City Council the value of this world-renowned protection, so that they might order their employés to make use of it; and all this painful period, with its thousands of deaths, and tens of thousands of racked and disfigured victims has even yet failed to convince multitudes, in the commercial metropolis, of the benefits of an operation long ago hailed as one of the greatest blessings granted to humanity. Even at this late date, the combined influence of the British and all other races, of the Roman Catholic clergy, enormous as is their power in social and religious matters, leaves many unimpressed and ready to encounter suffering and death, rather than face the imaginary evils connected with this almost absolute preventive of small-pox.

When such a system of political mismanagement and civic maladministration is considered, what wonder that the British element experiences a feeling of disgust and discouragement, or that in casting about for a remedy, the most radical or revolutionary are not repellant? The French, it is naturally contended by their British fellow-citizens, having had everything their own way both in the provincial and municipal spheres for nearly twenty years, have made a sad mess of it, bungling and sacrificing the interests of all alike; and a resolve to make a struggle of some kind for a better *régime*, for one according the British more influence and respect in the general co-partnership, quietly but rapidly takes form.

Any survey of Canadian affairs, however brief, would be seriously defective without a glance at the financial situation, upon which very recent official statements cast interesting light. The present ruling party at Ottawa, which has held office since 1878, and has a large interest in making the best possible case for itself, is compelled to admit a deficit of \$2,357,470 for the year ended 30th of June, last—the first large adverse balance witnessed for many years. The cause is not so much a decline in the revenue, as a sudden and unusual increase of the expenditure, apart from the cost of the Half-breed uprising. The growth of the expenditure exceeded for the twelve months, \$4,000,000. The total expenditure was \$35,327,935, the income being \$32,970,465. The Financial Minister, Sir L. Tilley, now resigned, expected a surplus of \$1,383,361, and the warmest ministerial advocates admit a deficit of \$657,470, after manipulating the figures of ordinary and extraordinary outlay in the most favorable way for their side. The debt has increased from \$93,000,000 in 1867, the year of confederation, to \$292,000,000, while the population has grown only 1,000,000. The taxation in 1868 was but \$11,700,660, and is now, according to Sir R. Cartwright, an ex-Finance Minister of the Dominion, and other authorities, speaking

from public documents, \$27,000,000. A deficit of two to three millions in the revenue is expected the current year, 1885-6. This gentleman has striven, with some success, at different public meetings, to deepen the serious impression produced by those financial statements throughout Canada, by comparing her financial condition with that of the United States. He asserts that Canadians are to-day in as unfortunate a condition relatively, as to debt and taxes, as were the people of this Republic at the end of the Civil War, which, of course, makes the actual condition of the latter infinitely superior. The Dominion debt has increased from \$30 per head to \$70, while the debt of the United States has been reduced from \$80 to \$28. Taxation in Canada has risen from about \$3 per head to over \$6, while it has been cut down in the Republic from \$14 to some \$3.50 per capita; and the Canadian population in the United States has swelled from 700,000, five years ago, to considerably over a million to-day. The value of real estate in Ontario, the richest and most prosperous province, fell \$30,000,000 last year, though there was some increase of stock and implements. To make the picture more complete I may state that Ontario has a surplus of between \$4,000,000 and \$5,000,000, while Quebec has lamented a deficit for several years, her actual debt reaching, according to Treasurer Robertson's last financial statement, over \$8,700,000!

Another material element of trouble to our Canadian neighbors has been the Riel affair. Not to deal with minor points or sectional prejudice, there was the fact of solid, long standing Half-breed grievances, for the removal of which Riel's aid was invoked, on the one side, to be offset, on the other, by the consideration of his ingratitude to the government, having previously accepted a bribe from the Dominion authorities to leave Canada, and mischievous course in promoting an uprising of half-civilized and savage elements capable of the greatest harm to the white settlers and the whole Dominion. The Metis leader's vanity and patriotic sentiments may have been moved by the appeals of his former *confrères* and compatriots, but it is nevertheless a fact that he offered for \$35,000 to sacrifice those who trusted him implicitly. Yet many liberal-minded and patriotic citizens of Canada, while stoutly disapproving of his whole course, could not support his execution, having doubts as to his sanity, under circumstances of excitement.

Unquestionably Riel's execution has produced a profound impression throughout the country, particularly upon the French Canadians, who have latterly made his fate a race or national question. This is the more remarkable, too, that the great majority of them being Conservatives, supporters of the present government, at Ottawa, agreed with the British

in condemning the revolt, and co-operated with them in its suppression. It was only since Riel's trial and sentence that a sincere sympathy with him developed, and an intense dislike to the idea of his execution. This somewhat questionable, if not inconsistent, attitude naturally evoked an opposite feeling with the British, especially with the Orange party, hitherto ardent supporters of Sir John Macdonald, the Premier, complicating the question, and rendering his position extremely difficult. On either hand useful and faithful friends of the government demanded an opposite course, though both only a short time before working vigorously for the same object—the suppression of the Half-breeds and Indians. At present the French Canadians, of both political parties, in all the cities and towns, as well as throughout the country districts, appear mostly of one mind in denouncing the government, and particularly their own special representatives, Sir Hector Langevin, Sir Adolphe Caron, and Mr. Chapleau, for the hanging of Riel, and the feeling has every appearance of lasting a long time, at any rate beyond the period of the next elections. The large defection of French Canadian supporters of the government, over twenty members, on this account alone, but imperfectly exemplifies the popular indignation, which has found characteristic though inadequate expression in the burning of those gentlemen, and Sir John Macdonald, in effigy, and in the assignment of the honors of the patriot and the martyr to Riel's memory.

The British element naturally considering the injury to the country produced by the late uprising—the loss of over one hundred lives, material destruction of property and waste of over \$4,000,000—resent such demonstrations as absurd and unpatriotic in every sense. Thus another source of contention between French and English is added to the already formidable list, bidding fair to render their relations still more unprofitable and perilous. The political effects of the present controversy and excitement in Quebec and Ontario, not to speak of the North-west, are likely to be far-reaching as well as lasting, the fate of the actual administration and, particularly, of its French members being most probably involved. In all those events, with their consequent existing and prospective troubles, we have presented another startling illustration of the serious difficulty of founding, by the great lakes and the shores of the St. Lawrence, out of the various, rival, jealous, and discordant races, a homogeneous, contented, and prosperous nation.

A most significant feature of this trouble and one full of suggestiveness to the people of this Republic, is the habit of any aggrieved province party, Liberal or Tory, in the Dominion, but particularly in Quebec or Ontario,

of promptly and earnestly casting its eyes toward the American Union, for that relief and future protection from injustice deemed difficult of attainment at home. Such straws appear so frequently as to leave no doubt whatever as to how the wind blows of late years. To the threat that annexation may be resorted to, *Le Monde*, representing Tory Federal ministers, coolly replies, "We fear not the specter of annexation." So even the old French Tory party is reconciled to that absorption by the voracious American Republic, with its appalling power of assimilation, formerly so terrible to it and its ablest leader, the late Sir George Cartier! Even English flirting with this idea would have been thought dreadfully disloyal and improbable some years ago, but a revolution would have been considered requisite to so transform the French Tories. The idea of wholesale political change is becoming familiar to the inhabitants of the other provinces too. We have seen reform leaders in the Federal Parliament, like Hon. Edward Blake, declaring themselves, eloquently, in favor of Imperial Federation, and his colleague, Sir Richard Cartwright, eulogizing Canadian Independence, to the great gratification of large and intelligent Ontario audiences. So the world of Canadian politicians of all parties does move, despite attempts to confine it within old sentimental ligatures, and maintain it indefinitely a satellite of England! When even a French Canadian province, with a population hitherto so conservative and monarchical in sentiment, can so quickly and quietly veer round to a mood of indifference on the subject of annexation, or, perhaps, of half inclination to such a change, what may not be asserted and expected of the British population in all the provinces? All must be aware that the French would be more profoundly affected by annexation than the British—affected in their nearest and dearest interests. But in all this vast change of sentiment, this rapid drift of friendly feeling toward the United States, have we not a compliment to its true greatness and a guarantee of its glorious future excelling in honor, as well as in inspiration, anything within the compass of human genius or the resources of mortal speech!

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

Prosper Bender

467/17^c
52

